Is Israel Preparing for a Military Strike against Iran?

There have been increasingly problematic reports about Israel's preparations to launch a military strike against Iran in recent days. It is well known that Israel considers Iran's nuclear program to be the "number one" issue. Despite Iran's repeated claims that developing a nuclear bomb is not part of its plans, tensions between the countries continue to escalate.

In a press briefing on August 25, Lieutenant General Aviv Kochavi, the Commander-in-Chief of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), publicly stated that the Israeli command is accelerating plans for a possible strike against Iran to prevent it from acquiring nuclear weapons. The Israeli military chief convened the briefing on the eve of Prime Minister Naftali Bennett's meetings with US officials (Secretary of State Anthony Blinken, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, and President Joe Biden) as part of his first official visit to Washington as head of the Jewish state's government.

The new Israeli prime minister has repeatedly stated that he is opposed to renewing the nuclear deal between Iran and the P5+1 group. In his Cabinet, Naftali Bennett stressed that he considered the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) obsolete and no longer "relevant to those who once thought it was relevant." Before his trip to the US, Bennett said he intended to provide Biden with a new strategy for countering Iran, which would include strengthening relations with some Arab countries and continuing sabotage of Iranian nuclear facilities. "What we
need to do, and what we are doing, is forming a regional coalition of reasonable Arab countries, together with us, that will fend off and block this expansion and this desire for domination,” he told The New York Times

Senior defense ministry officials said Israel "cannot rule out" any action against the nuclear program, reported Israel Hayom. In particular, Defense Minister Benny Gantz indicated that Israel "has the means to act and will not hesitate to act" to prevent Iran from becoming a nuclear state. Gantz stressed that he believes the credible threat of an Israeli strike on Iran's nuclear facilities is the only way US President Joe Biden's administration can negotiate a better nuclear deal with Tehran. "Israel has the means to act and will not hesitate to do so – I do not rule out the possibility that Israel will have to take action in the future to prevent a nuclear Iran," the minister said.

The IDF is speeding up operational plans against Iran because of the progress of the country's nuclear program, Lieutenant General Aviv Kochavi, the Commander-in-Chief of the Israel Defense Forces, told The Jerusalem Post. "Progress on Iran's nuclear program has forced the IDF to accelerate its operational plans, and the recently approved defense budget is designed to do just that," he said. According to Israeli media reports, the IDF's defense budget of 58 billion shekels set for the coming year will allow the Israeli military to focus on threats from Iran across the region. Directly allocated NIS 3.5 billion to counter Iran.

In this regard, Aviv Kochavi commented on Prime Minister Naftali Bennett's arrival in the United States, indicating that Bennett will push Biden to tighten his approach to Iran. In the absence of diplomatic options that could push Tehran to end its nuclear program, the Israeli military considers the possibility of harsher sanctions against Iran. Military operations against Iran's nuclear program are also possible.

As recently as January 14, the Israel Hayom newspaper reported that the Israel Defense Forces were developing plans to strike Iran's nuclear facilities. Citing its military sources, the publication claimed that Aviv Kohavi, then head of the Israeli General Staff, had requested three alternative proposals to disrupt Tehran's nuclear program. Without going into detail about the substance of these proposals, Israel Hayom indicated that a military operation against the Islamic Republic was being considered as one option.

Under the circumstances, The New York Times, citing senior Israeli officials, reports that the visit of the new Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett to Washington has as its primary goal to secure the White House's consent to continue covert operations against Iran's nuclear program. According to the newspaper, Israel fears that US President Joe Biden's intention to return Washington to the Nuclear Deal with Tehran could sabotage Iranian nuclear facilities or assassinate Iranian nuclear scientists.

However, the United States is committed to dismantling the Iranian nuclear program officially and has stated a desire to do so diplomatically. "We are very clear that it remains in our national interest to seek a mutual return to compliance with the JCPOA," Ned Price, the Spokesperson for the United States Department of State, reported. As for Israel's current mood to move the resolution of Iran's nuclear program to an active dimension, including military, the Biden administration has so far openly opposed it. And this was confirmed by a recent publication by The New York Times, which emphasized that Israel "upset the US with a formal signal before attacking Iran's nuclear facility." As the Israeli newspaper Haaretz commented on this article on August 26, Israel warned the United States less than two hours before its plans to attack Iran's Natanz nuclear site in April of this year. This reflected the policy of then Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to keep Joe Biden's administration in the dark about Israel's actions in Iran. Short notice to Netanyahu before the Natanz operation deprived US intelligence agencies of sufficient time to respond. Nevertheless, a few days after the attack, Washington said it was not involved in the operation. After the Natanz attack, CIA Director William Burns called Yossi Cohen, former Mossad Chief, to express concern about the "disregard for the established practice of prior consultation."

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